



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE FREUDIAN DOCTRINE OF LAPSES AND ITS FAILINGS

By A. A. ROBACK, Harvard University.

Whether Freud's interpretation of lapses constitutes an integral part of his system or not, of one thing we are certain, and that is the growing importance of that phase of psychology as throwing light on every day occurrences, which, insignificant in themselves, are often the vehicles of portentous events.

We seldom notice a slip unless it assumes the proportions of a blunder. Sometimes we are prone to attach an ominous significance to such an occurrence, which fact might account for the halo of mystery surrounding the subject in semi-intellectual spheres. Aside from that, however, there is something fascinating about a situation where one acts, as it were, in spite of himself. It is our intention to say one thing, yet we say another. We purpose writing a certain word or phrase; our fingers, however, execute a set of movements other than those intended. What is at the root of this mischief.

The current phrase "forcing the hand" expresses the feeling rampant among the common people—as if the act were of extraneous origin. It is represented as the precursor of either a fortunate or an unfortunate event. Thus it takes the form of a symbol announcing the advent of the happening proper.

It is now evident that here we touch on Freudian territory. No one, of course, would think of imputing to the Freudian School the primitive view just referred to. Freud would be the last man to trace a slip to extraneous causes or to regard it as indicative of a future good or evil. But it is *symbolism* nevertheless which connects his doctrine with the crude belief of the man in the street. The lapse according to Freud and his followers, is symbolic of the *hidden motives* at work in the mind of the person guilty of the slip. The slip might then be said to manifest itself as an interference between the open intention and the underlying motive, the former being misplaced by the latter.

Curious as it may seem, Freud's doctrine of lapses has been rather immune from the darts of his many critics, though of all his doctrines, it is the only one which is amenable to experi-

mental investigation. Aside from the positive arguments that may be invoked in criticism of his conclusions, there is much in his account that is impugnable on the strength of common sense.

If asked to sum up in a word the failing of the Freudian interpretation of lapses, one might say it is *misrepresentation*. In most cases emphasis is laid on irrelevant details, while essential facts are ignored. Freud takes a dash in the wrong direction, to begin with, and leaves no room for simple explanation.

The writer does not wish to convey the impression that he is belittling Freud's valuable service in other fields. Quite the contrary, he believes that Freud has opened new vistas in psychology,¹ but it happens that in his eagerness to subsume every human act under his all-embracing doctrine, he is blinded to a number of simple facts. Some of the interpretations in the "Psychopathology of Everyday Life" fairly make us gasp. Not only is there not the slightest plausibility in the tentative explanation, but every bit of *vraisemblance* is occasionally lacking, unless we assume that his patients belong to the class of people characterized by the heroes of Dostoevsky's and more particularly Artzibashev's novels. And if so, the question arises as to what degree of trustworthiness can be attached to them. Can we, for a moment, think that a woman patient who was "ashamed" of herself for having made a slip of the tongue when asked how her uncle was, by saying, "I don't know, I only see him now *in flagranti*," when what she meant to say was, of course, *en passant*—can we imagine that she would try to vindicate herself the next day of the possible imputation that she was not an educated person by reproducing "a reminiscence. . . . in which being caught *in flagranti* played the principal part"?² And the conclusion is that "the mistake of the previous day had therefore anticipated the recollection, which at that time had not yet become conscious."

That is not all. The critical reader will often have reason to suspect that certain characteristics and traits are occasionally read into the poor patients *ex post facto*. A young woman "who is the domineering spirit in her home"³ is so naturally because her speech lapse fits in with such a characterization.

¹A. A. Roback. *Menorah Journal*, vol. v., 1919, pp. 24-32.

² Freud: *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, p. 84. (Brill's translation). The passage is poorly translated. It should read ". . . in which the fact of being caught *in flagranti* figured most conspicuously."

³Freud (Brill) *loc. cit.* p. 91

Another woman "who was especially weighed down by the financial burden of her treatment" is probably credited with this circumstance by Brill,⁴ just because she actually said, "Please do not give me *big bills*", when she meant to say "big pills." Brill attributes the lapse to the patient's circumstances. We prefer to take the simpler course and say that the mistake was due to a repetitionary assimilation in the direction of the easier sound, as it requires less effort to articulate a "b" than it does a "p."

The Freudians have not learned the truth of Occam's principle "*entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*." They rather seem to put a premium on the introduction of as many factors as possible—and to no purpose; for, entertaining as the stories and anecdotes are, some of them self-incriminatory,⁵ they *do not tell us anything about the mechanism of the lapse*. Has it ever occurred to Freud and his own, that in most instances cited where positive and negative concepts been unintentionally interchanged, the fact is *that in practically every case the lapse is brought about by the elimination of the prefix un or in?* The reason for this is that in the excitement of speaking or writing, we fasten our hold, often anticipatorily, on the stem of the word and not on the prefixes, which are separable and which in themselves are not significant. The important part is the "fortunate" and not the "un,"⁶ the "selfish" and not the "un,"⁷ the "responsible" and not the "ir."⁸ Stekel and Freud may make much ado about a slip where "in eigennützigster weise" was written instead of "in uneigennützigster weise,"⁹ but rather than say that the author of the slip was actually accusing himself of selfishness, why not look into the formation of the word misspelled? Might we not expect, in the case of a clumsy compound, drawn out in the superlative form, at least the lopping off of the negative particle, especially when there are already two n's in the stems of the word? It is really a matter of omission, and as abundantly proven, it is the particles and less important words that are omitted in haste, excitement, embarrassment and so on. The inexperienced public speaker will find that the substantives come to him readily but the prepo-

⁴ Freud *loc. cit.* p. 103.

⁵ The self-incriminatory character of these allusions is so striking that they might be regarded as manifestations of a sublimated exhibitionism.

⁶ For the references in this connection *cf. loc. cit.* p. 425.

⁷ *loc. cit.* p. 126.

⁸ *loc. cit.* p. 106.

⁹ Freud: *Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*, 2nd German ed. p. 55.

sitions are rather tardy. Stoll, too, has reported¹⁰ that in the copying of the meaningful texts, the words most omitted were those that were of secondary importance. From our own results, we can extend this observation to cover letters, for as compared with the large consonants (letters like j, k, p, f, etc.) the vowels, semi-vowels, and small consonants were slurred.

The upshot of this criticism is that Freud and his associates are not warranted in attaching a hidden meaning to such lapses on the strength of uncritical and one-sided observations. If the writer intended to say that many of the Freudian arguments are inane, and his interpretations inept, and wrote instead of inane and inept, the stem-components "ane" and "ept," Freud might have had some slight ground, on his principle, for assuming that at bottom we are in sympathy with all his doctrines. Our protest would not be so loud in such a case against the assumption, *because the words "ane" and "ept" are not used without the negative particle*. Hence it would mean the breaking up of a graphic habit—a disruption which requires explanation. This concession, on our part, however, would not hold if the word intended were "inapt," for "apt" is a common word in every-day use; and so the lapse would originate in accordance with our previous explanations. The only case of a *lapsus calami* where the larger negative form "unhappy" was substituted for the intended word "happy" is given by Ernest Jones¹¹ who was told by a lady that an "old friend in writing to her closed the letter with the curious sentence, 'I hope you are well and unhappy.'" According to Jones, "the slip of the pen was evidently determined by his dislike at the thought of her being happy with some one else" as he had entertained hope of marrying her himself. Even this solitary case pointing apparently to the operation of a wish complex may easily be explained by supposing that the slip was occasioned by the conflict not of *two wishes*—the one censored and the other primitive—but rather by the interference of a *wish* and a *fact*, the mental attitude corresponding to the expression. "I hope you are well and happy, though I am unhappy." In other words, the antithesis is not between two states in the future, but between the future and the present. There is no need of positing even here a hidden wish mechanism. Most likely, the writer was actually thinking of his unhappy condition at the time he was concluding his letter,

¹⁰ J. Stoll: Zur Psychologie der Schreibfehler, Fortschritte der psychologic, etc., vol. II, 1913-14, pp. 22-48.

¹¹ E. Jones: Papers on Psycho-Analysis: p. 63.

and the various imaginal elements that went to make up his mental attitude, were probably synthetized by the word "unhappy."

There are, nevertheless, two or three accounts of a *lapsus linguae* in Freud's (Brill) *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* that we can become reconciled to, but only after definite qualification.

Brill relates of an admirer of Roosevelt who remarked to his host on the occasion of an evening dance,

"You may say what you please about Teddy, but there is one thing he can always be relied upon; he always gives you a square meal."¹² What he was about to say was a "square deal," but the guests had reason to be disappointed in the hospitality of the host, and this embarrassing slip gave away the situation.

We have no difficulty here in accepting Brill's implication, provided it is admitted, on the other side, that the speaker had been *thinking* of the word "meal" that evening and probably the idea came up several times and, that too, suffused with emotion, as in the case of every hungry man. Hence there was with him what we should call a "predisposed attitude." Now the fact that square is used with both meal and deal, and that the two words are so similar in sound much helped the "predisposed attitude" to bring about the association and finally the unfortunate slip.

In the same way also is it understandable that a person who entertains high ideas of his importance would sometimes substitute an "I" when he is referring to other people, especially those he looks up to. Here we may say that a "prepotent attitude" (congenital) is at the root of such lapses.

Freudians will probably seize with great avidity on a passage in ex-ambassador Gerard's *My Four Years in Germany* as tending to corroborate their complex doctrine of lapses; and, for their benefit, the passage is reproduced here.

"Monday afternoon there was a Bierabend in the large hall of the Yacht Club at Kiel. The Emperor was to have presided at this dinner, but his place was taken by his brother, Prince Henry. Sir Edward Goschen, the British Ambassador, who was living on one of the British battleships, sat on his right and I sat on his left. During the evening a curious incident happened. The Prince and I were talking of the dangers of after-dinner speaking and what a dangerous sport it was. In the midst of our conversation someone whispered to the Prince and he rose to his feet, proposed the health of the visiting British Admiral and fleet and made a little speech. As he concluded, he said, addressing the officers of the British fleet. 'We are sorry you are going and we are sorry you came.'"¹³

¹² *loc. cit.*— p. 102.

¹³ James W. Gerard: *My Four Years in Germany*, p. 107

What we should insist upon, however, in opposition to Freud and his school is that emphasis be laid on the *actual association* in the speaker's or writer's mind between the word intended and the mis-expression. The association most frequently is, but need not necessarily be, verbal. It may be kinaesthetic, organic, and what not, but pregnant with meaning just the same. Thus we are not obliged to resort to unknown and hidden unconscious forces that are constantly distilling sexual and other complexes.

On the subject of writing mistakes, Freud's material is rather tenuous, this time not only in quality, but also in quantity.¹⁴ There are really very few illustrations here of genuine writing lapses, as Freud does not take the trouble to separate out the memory lapses, and deals with several kinds of mistakes indiscriminately. Yet when we do come across a *lapsus calami* proper we find much ado made about it. He takes two pages to account for a slip of his that could be done to much better advantage in a few lines. Here is the instance. Wishing to draw some money from the bank, he glanced at his account, and finding that it was 4380 crowns, he decided to bring it down to the round sum of 4000 crowns. Upon making out the cheque, however, he noticed that he had written 438 instead of 380 crowns.¹⁵ Common sense and experimental evidence¹⁶ would lead us to believe that while his attention was occupied with something else, the determining tendency to subtract 380 was in abeyance. Hence his action incorporated the elements of perception of the figures and the marginal idea of subtraction. Some figure was to go. Now in a number like 4380, what impresses one is the 438, not the cipher. The 438 is more like a unit. It has more significance, besides the 0 comes at the end, and in many of our computations, for instance, in division, we have occasion to lop off the cipher at the end. Under the determining tendency to subtract mentally, this mathematical stereotyped act reinstated itself and the 0 was disregarded making the number 438, which was promptly copied on the cheque.

In the opinion of the writer, this explains amply what has taken place psychologically, but Freud naturally must introduce a whole series of numbers and weave into his material

¹⁴A rather significant fact when we consider that Freud recognizes together with Wundt, there is a greater tendency to make slips of the pen than slips of the tongue (cf. his *Psychopathologie des Alltagsleben*, 2nd. edition, p. 56.)

¹⁵*Loc. cit.* pp. 122-123

¹⁶cf. A. A. Roback: *The Interference of Will-Impulses*, *Psych. Rev. Monogr.* Supplements vol. xxv, 1918, p. 91ff.

several interesting, though irrelevant, stories to account for such a comparatively simple operation.

Playing with numbers is a pastime much relished by the Freudians. In the Chapter on Determinism we are treated to a veritable number-salad which does honor to the old cabalists and mystic commentators of the Pentateuch, for in *their* exegesis, they were guided at least by a system of hard and fast rules. The commentary called Ba'al ha-Turim by *Jacob ben Asher* of the 14th century, has much in common with Freud's number-juggling, and it may be said that many of the *Notarikin* and *Gematrioth*¹⁷ as they are known, contain sex allusions calculated to illuminate certain episodes in the Bible. Sometimes it would even seem as if Freud's race-fellow of the fourteenth century has proven himself the more ingenious of the two in that respect.¹⁸

From Freud let us pass to some of his devotees and see what they have to offer in the way of solving the problem of language interferences.

When a student writes April 11, 1911, instead of April 22, 1911, what simpler and more plausible explanation may we resort to than the fact of motor anticipation? Jones¹⁹ rightly observes that "the date he actually wrote was the 11th, was no doubt influenced by the presence of these integers at the end of 1911." If, however, such a simple explanation were allowed to stand, then what would become of the Psychopathology of everyday life, which must be fed on illustrations of this sort? Hence the narrator interposes with a "but." The explanation is discounted by the psychoanalyst's saying: "But it is to be noted even in this connection that his mistake consisting [sic] in writing them earlier than he should, i. e. in putting the date earlier." Surely this offers no cause for mystification. Anticipation is just as legitimate a mode of making a slip as repetition. But furthermore, if Professor Jones had only taken the trouble to investigate the material, he would have noticed that in 1911 there occur four down-strokes, furthermore, that the student had been writing, in dates, the number 22 as compared with 1911 in the ratio of 12: 365. Why, then, on the basis of graphic habituation, is

¹⁷ cf. Jewish Encyclopedia under Notarikon and Gematria respectively.

¹⁸ A. A. Roback: *Freudian Psychology and Jewish Commentators of the Bible*. Jewish Forum, Oct. 1918.

¹⁹ E. Jones: *Psycho-Analysis*, p. 63.

it at all strange that the student should have put the date earlier?²⁰

The hypothesis that Jones put forth is to the effect that the student was unprepared for a certain examination due in the first week of May and wished, therefore, to have more time. But if a wish were really the determining factor of the lapse, the substitution should have occurred not in the *date* of the month but with the *name* of the month, as we may well imagine that to "be through" with an examination is a more pious wish with a student than to have the ordeal merely put off.

Every one of Jones's illustrations might be analyzed without reference to any wish complex. Thus when intending to write "Dear Fred" he substituted Freud for Fred,²¹ the explanation is quite clear and does not call for the supposition that Jones had entertained a hidden wish to be on intimate terms with Freud. Jones himself admits that the circumstances of the slip of the pen were extraordinarily favorable to its occurrence—the similarity in the names, the previous identification of the men, the occasion of the letter following so soon after the other one and so on. The remarkable thing about the admission is that Jones has not recognized the fact that while he had been writing the word "Freud" hundreds if not thousands of times, not to mention the countless occasions on which he had seen the name in print, thought about it, articulated it, etc.,—while the name Freud then was playing the part of the sun in a solar system, the salutation "dear Fred" was being used for the first time as it was addressed to an old friend "whom I had always called by his surname."

Another instance of stretching interpretations is afforded by the following account again taken from Jones's book: "A young lady was secretly engaged to a medical man, whom we will call Arthur X. She addressed a letter one day not to Dr. Arthur X, but to Dear Arthur X, thus expressing her desire to let all the world know of their relationship."²²

It is strange that in the section on misprints which Jones had published originally in a journal, a slip had crept in which, though corrected afterwards, was not commented upon, in his *Psycho-Analysis*. On the part of a Freudian the missing of any opportunity to make a case for the favorite cult is almost

²⁰ It is very amusing in this connection that, while Jones seems so puzzled about the student "writing them (the integers 11) earlier than he should," what should he himself do (or perhaps it is the compositor's fault) but make the very same kind of a slip; for instead of saying "consisted in writing" he has it "*consisting* in writing."

²¹ Jones: *Loc. cit.* p. 65.

²² Jones: *Loc. cit.* p. 65.

symptomatic as a "Fehlhandlung" and would, in its turn, require an explanation. The slip referred to consists of the word "brochure" being mis-spelt as "broschure." The sentence in the original article reads: "In a brochure of mine that appeared as a German translation, a mistake was made of a less unfortunate kind."²³ Were we as uncharitable as most of the Freudians are in their evaluations of phenomena, we might be inclined to say that the intercalation of the s in "brochure" was due to the submerged feeling on the part of the author that the pamphlet or its substance was obscure, but in order to forestall any such ingenious interpretation, might we not suggest that the slip was made on account of the German setting produced by the circumstances described in the sentence quoted?

The following up of writing lapses by Freudians, who in their very comments make more slips thus affording the opportunity for subsequent writers of the same school to make additional observations incorporating ever new slips—this whole process is a veritable "comedy of errors." Let us give an illustration of this entertaining game.

In his papers on Psycho-Analysis, Jones had written that "distinctness of calligraphy is powerless to prevent such mistakes."²⁴ This statement occasions Holt to make the following observations: "'Why *calligraphy*'? thought I, since of course calligraphy is necessarily distinct and Jones besides being a careful writer perfectly knows his classics. Of course he had unconsciously written 'calligraphy' instead of 'chirography,' because of the delicate boast which is thus conveyed, that his handwriting is always, even when indistinct 'beautiful.' To this extent his ego-complex had eluded his censor.. This was too good to lose, so at the bottom of the page I wrote in pencil, with reference to 'calligraphy' above, 'Should be 'chiro': Another case of *Verschreiben* [*lapsus calami*] *zw.* odious cause.' And then the joke was on me. I had fully intended to write 'obvious' and was as astonished to see 'odious' as if another person had written it."²⁵

Well, it was my good fortune to see Professor Holt's note in the original, and I may say that in his pencil note the word 'chiro' appears as 'cheiro,' so that in the very copying of the note, Professor Holt, who is punctiliously careful in such matters, had made a slip which was not corrected. But further-

²³ Jones: The Psychopathology of everyday Life: "American Journal of Psychology, vol. XXII, 1911, p. 503.

²⁴ E. Jones: Papers on Psycho-Analysis, p. 71.

²⁵ E. B. Holt: *The Freudian Wish*, p. 32.

more, the slip "odious" for "obvious" may easily be explained on another and simpler ground than the one furnished by Holt. Those who have access to that particular book, which is in the philosophical library of Harvard University, will find that the word 'should' in the note was written directly above the word 'obvious.' There are certain letters in words that stand out and catch the attention more strikingly than others, and the 'd' of 'should,' written as it was on that part of the page, is one of these letters. Professor Holt must have seen the d of 'should' just as he was beginning the o of obvious and copied it unintentionally; and being, as a rule, more critical than positive in his attitude, the word 'odious' has probably just about as many chances of occurring to his mind as the word obvious.

But the climax is yet to come. In spite of all the explanations and observations and inferences, Professor Jones has made no slip in the first place; for though he may "perfectly know his classics," he seems thoroughly grounded in his English, too, at least enough to be aware of the fact that there are good precedents for using "calligraphy" in the sense of mere handwriting, regardless of its aesthetic value. Had he written 'chirography' instead, he might have been accused of delicately boasting his perfect knowledge of the classics, even if he should not have laid himself open to the charge of pedantry.

Thus we see (1) that the supposed slip was a perfectly correct usage and should not have called forth the "odious" complex; (2) the substitution of the word 'odious' for 'obvious' is happily explained, and (3) the real lapse—that of writing 'chiro' for 'cheiro' as it appears in the original note—was not recorded.

A misprint in which the Austrian prince was referred to as a "gegenstiftender Mittler" instead of "Segenstiftender Mittler" occasions A. J. Storfer²⁶ to go into certain details bearing on the political relations between Austria and Hungary. If Storfer had only laid his history aside and examined the sentence more closely he would have seen that in the words "beruhigt den gegenstiftenden, etc.," the substituted "g" is an assimilation caused either by the perseveration of the "g" in *beruhigt* or by the anticipation of the "g" in the word *Segenstiftenden*, or both, the perseveration determining the anticipation.

²⁶A. J. Storfer: *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltags Intern. Zeitschrift für ärztliche Psychoanalyse*, vol. II, 1914, p. 172.

In expressing his condolence to a young woman who had recently lost her husband, someone had employed the words:

"Sie werden Trost finden, indem Sie
sich völlig Ihren Kindern widmen."

This apparently is a case of repetitionary assimilation, partially determined by the consciousness, on the part of the speaker (or writer), that he was addressing a widow. Th. Reik's²⁷ interpretation of this perfectly harmless slip is that the suppressed idea alluded to consolation of a different sort, viz:

"eine junge schöne Witwe wird
bald neue Sexualfreuden genießen."

Comment on this is unnecessary.

At times it looks as if the "complex" mechanism were to operate in a prophetic manner. The minor Freudians never allow themselves to stop before any extravagance in drawing their inferences. Thus the mere substitution of a D for a P in the word "Epithel," by a person whose acquaintance with an Edith was only superficial at the time of the slip but had afterwards become intimate, elicits the following explanation from the author: "Das Verschreiben ist also ein hübscher Beweis für den Durchbruch der unterbewussten Neigung zu einer Zeit wo ich selbst eigentlich davon noch keine Ahnung hatte, und die gewählte Form des Diminutivums Charakterisiert gleichzeitig die begleitenden Gefühle."²⁸

As usual, we are told everything that may have a remote connection with the origin of the lapse, but the sentence in which the word "Epithel" was to have occurred is not given. As to the diminutive form(?) revealing the embryonic affections of the writer who was apparently not aware of them at the time they "accompanied" the slip, it is enough to say that the explanation is highly ingenuous and amusing. In all probability, the mistake was caused by either an anticipatory or perseverative assimilation, and *Edithel* was no more of a diminutive form than *Epithel* is. The assimilatory process may of course have been touched off because of a previous association which had gained a certain amount of vividness and, therefore, impressive force, but even so, we are not warranted in ascribing an oracular function to the subconscious mechanism presiding over slips of the pen.

An ante-bellum allusion to the great European conflict is

²⁷ Th. Reik: *Fehlleistungen im Alltagsleben intern. Zeitschrift für ärztliche Psychoanalyse*, vol. III, 1915, p. 44.

²⁸ Richard Wagner: *Ein kleiner Beitrag zur Psychopathologie des Alltagsleben: Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse*, vol. I, 1911, p. 594

mentioned by Emil Simonson²⁹ who cites the report in a German newspaper of an interview given out by the then Russian minister of foreign affairs, Sazanov, to the *Novoye Veremya*. In this interview, Sazanov was quoted as discussing the friendly relations between the Triple Entente and the Dual Alliance (Zweibund), but as Italy, at the time, had been one of the members of the Alliance, to which the minister was referring, the quotation raised some comment in German political circles.

A diplomatic malapropism of this sort leads Simonson to remark that there was uncertainty somewhere as regards Italy's place in the Triple Alliance; and if the slip was made either actually by Sazanov or someone else on the Russian side, the likelihood is that it was caused by a feeling that Italy might be induced to part company with Austria and Germany, while if either the German correspondent in Russia or the newspaper in Germany was responsible for the lapse, the incident is to be explained by the fact that its author was distrustful of Italy's attitude and secretly harbored the belief that it would be better for Germany and Austria to remain a dual alliance.

Simonson's expectations, or rather knowledge of the situation turned out to be correct, but, interesting as this bit of information may be, it is irrelevant to the matter in hand unless we know definitely whether Sazanov has made a slip in the first place or whether it was his intention merely to stress the original core of the Alliance. Besides, in the report of an interview, so many different agencies are involved that we should only be groping in the dark for a foothold until we can trace at least the source of the lapse.

The Freudian complex distillery does not appear to be so productive in French as it is in German, yet we must not suppose that the French language is immune to misinterpretation, and, for the sake of variety, we might look into a couple of French versions of the Freudian story with a bit of Swiss local color.

R. Weber,³⁰ to begin with, gives illustrations of lapses occurring with the inmates of the institution with which he is connected. The *lapsus calami* which has been singled out as especially characteristic is one made by Weber himself when

²⁹ Emil Simonson: Ein interessanter Fall von "Versprechen" oder "Verschreiben." *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse*. Vol. II, 1912, p. 363.

³⁰ R. Weber: Petite Psychologie. *Archives Internationales de Neurologie*, 1912, reviewed in the *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse*, Vol. II, p. 536.

he wrote instead of *Peillard*—the name of a patient who was known for his wantonness—the word *Paillard* which is the vulgar expression in French for “rake.” A pun of this sort is nothing but natural, but if Weber was not really aware of punning at the time he made the slip, we need only recall the fact that the word *paille* and its derivatives are so commonly used in French, while the word *peille* is not to be found in the dictionary—to understand the cause of the slip. The mistake, then, is only the expression of a motor habit.

Maeder³¹ reports an elaborate bi-lingual lapse. In the first place, he could not, according to a dream of his, find the French word for “gauze,” and so he asked for it in German, using the word *Mull*, but when he read over the dream he recorded, he found that instead of *Mull* he had written down *moule*—a word a friend of his family was in the habit of using as an equivalent for “blockhead.”

The explanation unfolds a long series of associations which give us a roundabout clue of the origin of the particular lapse.

Much less satisfactory is an account of a lapse offered by H. Hellmuth.³² *Levitico* (Wasser) had been substituted in a prescription for *Levico* (Wasser); and we are supposed to believe that at the root of this slip was the desire on the part of the physician to have his patient dress *quickly* and make room for another patient. Hence he had incorporated the French word “vite” (quick) into the mis-spelled German word (!). When it comes to fanciful explanations, the female Freudians are evidently not to be outdone by their male colleagues.

That it is not difficult to hit upon a Freudian interpretation can be seen from the following facts. Claparède³³ relates how one day he wanted to administer some laudanum to a patient, but asked his assistant to hand him the bottle of tincture of iodine. A careful introspective account follows as to how the mistake originated. He traces this lapse back to an associative dynamic which he would call mechanical, passive, or superficial in contradistinction to Freud’s intentional, active or deep-seated dynamic. In another case, analogous to this he had said “bismuth” when it was his intention to say “magnesia.” His explanation of this is similar. The visual

³¹ A. Maeder: *Psychologie de la Vie Quotidienne. Archives de Psychologie*, vol. 7, 1908, p. 288.

³² H. Hellmuth: Beiträge zum Kapitel “Verschreiben” und “Verlesen.” *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse*, Vol. II, 1912, p. 277.

³³ Ed. Claparède: De la représentation des personnes inconnues et des *lapses linguac.* *Arch. de Psychologie*, vol. XIV, 1914, p. 503.

image of the two powders is the same (white) and governs two words with the predominance of the one of these visuo-verbal associations over the other. Are we to suppose, Claparède asks, alluding evidently to Freud, that I had a secret desire to constipate the patient who needed a purgative? And picking up a psycho-analytic journal, what do we find but that Ferenczi,³⁴ Freud's adjutant is inclined to accept Claparède's *reductio ad absurdum* question as the proper solution of the lapse.

Finally, we have still to analyze the case referred to by Menzenrath who repudiates the doctrine of Freud, and yet comes very close to adopting Freud's method and certainly the instance we are about to cite is a typical Freudian interpretation, much as Menzenrath may deny it.

Menzenrath³⁵ had begun writing to a friend,

"Dass Sie bald nach . . . zu kommen
gedenken, macht mir besonders Vergnügen,

but instead of *besonders* he wrote *beden*—i. e., he had started to say "*Bedenken*" which he explains as a complex due to the fact that the pleasure was not "particularly" great, and the whole note was an idle conventional form. That may well be, but Menzenrath had not noticed that the word "*gedenken*" preceded the unfinished "*bedenken*." Here we have an assimilation pure and simple. Furthermore it is unlikely that the word begun was *Bedenken*, for then it would have been written with a capital letter. It is apparent that the word was begun as "*besonders*," but as soon as the stroke of the "e" in "*be*," was finished, there was a shift of attention, and as "*be*" is similar to "*ge*" in sound, and both are prefixes of "*denken*," it need not at all seem odd that the *denken* of *gedenken* should reverberate while the mind was wandering.

In a later discussion,³⁶ Menzenrath shows still less sympathy with Freud's "universal hypothesis," though he thinks it is impossible on the part of adversaries to disprove Freud's contentions on introspective grounds. That Menzenrath has exaggerated Freud's invulnerability on the matter of speech and writing lapses, will, it is hoped, become evident from our present study.

The trouble with the Freudians is that instead of seeking

³⁴ S. Ferenczi: *Internat. Zeitschrift für ärztliche Psych.* Vol. III, 1915, p. 123.

³⁵ P. Menzenrath: *Psychopathologie de la vie journalière, Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie*, vol. XXIII, 1912, p. 510. Report of the VI^e Congrès belge de Psychologie et de Psychiatrie.

³⁶ P. Menzenrath: *Fehler des Alltagsleben: Kongress für Experimentelle Psychologie*, VI, Göttingen, p. 57

an explanation in the context, in the immediate mental content, they soar off into the realm of the fantastic for their search, and return with a far-fetched interpretation. *As a methodological principle in the study of lapses, the writer would lay down the rule that first the word, sentence, or sentences preceding or following are to be examined*, then we must look into possible associations that may have determined the mistake; only in default of such clues, would it be legitimate to hunt for a new principle of explanation.

The Freudians scarcely ever give us the whole context of a lapse, but prefer to concoct a solution of the home-made brand and, it may be added, for home consumption. In the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, there are a number of acute observations, but in a great many statements there is neither rhyme nor reason, and in general Freud's doctrine must be taken *cum grano salis*. To be consistent, he should hold that *a workman who misses his step on a high scaffold and falls into space has a secret desire of ending his life; for in what way is the psychological mechanism of such a slip any different from others that bring no grave consequences with them?*

Similarly, the person who has taken poison by mistake—let us say the toper who reached out for the bottle of wood alcohol instead of the rum—is afflicted with a *tedium vitae*. In fact, many serious accidents, countless misfortunes are caused by slips. Are we to conclude, then, whenever some evil befalls us that somewhere in our nervous system there is a hankering after the mishap? Much of our illness is due to what is ordinarily spoken of as thoughtlessness. We escort our friend to the door on a cold night and unmindful of the fact that we have just left an overheated room, we stand in the draft conversing until we catch cold. Where disease is contracted through infection or contagion, lapses are nearly always at the root of such contractions. Yet we shall have a difficult task finding the man who may be said to invite illness, however unconsciously, unless as very rarely happens, when illness is a boon alternative as compared with some greater evil that may be in store for him.³⁷ As a rule, however, there does not seem

³⁷ Cf. A German Deserter's War Experience, p. 163. . . . "We were especially forbidden to make use of woolen blankets, because the French were infected with scabies. 'Scabies' is an itching skin which it takes at least a week to cure. But the order had a contrary effect. If one was the owner of such an 'itch blanket' one had a chance of getting into the hospital for some days." . . . "In the evening we took some of the forbidden blankets, hundreds of which we had captured that day . . . everybody wanted to get the 'itch,' however strange that may sound."

to be the slightest motive for wishing to fall ill or for courting death. Even the motives that are thought to produce the questionable Oedipus and Electra complexes cannot be exploited in this connection.

Freud has been so fortunate in the authority he wields among his devotees that his utterances are accepted uncritically. On the other hand, most of the criticisms directed against Freud have come from men who dislike his doctrine on general principles, but who have not taken the trouble to subject his illustrations to a rigorous examination. It is on this very account that we have spent so much time on the discussion of Freud's analysis of lapses. His doctrine should further receive its *coup de grâce* by the trend of our experimental results³⁸ which show that lapses have been made in the hundreds; lapses in numbers, nonsense syllables, characters of the alphabet and other symbols. Shall we posit hidden complexes for each of them? But a given word or syllable may have been misspelled in many different ways by the same subject. The whole idea of looking for unconscious motives in experimental work of this sort seems too absurd to barely mention. In what way, then, are the lapses occurring in everyday life to be regarded as of a different material?

The principle of *determinism* which forms the background of the Freudian theory of lapses is sound, of course, *per se*. No scientist would deny that the writing lapse is conditioned by certain physiological or psychological antecedents. But what right has one to *create* a cause when the direct antecedent is in most cases apparent. Occasionally, as Wundt has recognized, there may be a complication of causes which it would be almost impossible to disentangle, and psychical influences may be at work,³⁹ but Wundt is by no means a Freudian even in the matter of speech lapses, though Freud eagerly seizes on a quotation from the *Völkerpsychologie* as a pretext for dragging in "Saul among the prophets," and by italicizing the phrase "*following the principle of the complication of causes*" in the passage quoted from Wundt the Viennese psychopathologist has evidently attached a special significance to Wundt's words, thus leaving the reader mystified.⁴⁰ In this state, the latter is apt to believe that Wundt has made an important concession to Freud.

³⁸ This study, which will shortly be published, constitutes the second part of the *Interference of Will-Impulses* previously referred to.

³⁹ Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie, die Sprache*, Vol. I, part I, pp. 361-382, 1900.

⁴⁰ Freud: *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (English translation), pp. 79-80.

Well, then, let it be pointed out that the quotation mentioned has been broken off abruptly just where Wundt proceeds to illustrate precisely what he means by "a complication of causes." It certainly has no reference to any suppressed wishes or complexes, but to the *ordinary processes of association*, stimulated perhaps by the initial syllable of another word, or to several of the processes, already explained, taken collectively.

Not the slightest trace of adherence to, or rather anticipation of, Freud's principles can be detected in Wundt's discussion of lapses; and it is idle to read into his views such an interpretation. Moreover, it occurs to us that if Freud misinterprets a simple passage written in his native tongue, then how much more prone is he to put a wrong interpretation on phenomena as variegated as they are elusive? And if the master is apt to err so profoundly in an ordinary matter, then what shall we say of the epigones who lack his penetrating insight and generalizing ability as well as his systematic grasp of the phenomena generally classed under the subconscious?